

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

IMMIGRATION REMOVAL CENTRES

Immigration removal centres (IRCs) are holding places for foreign nationals awaiting decisions on their asylum claims or awaiting deportation following a failed application. The power to detain immigrants was first provided by the Immigration Act 1971 when 'detention centres' – as they were then called – were introduced to impose restrictions on the movement of immigrants while their claims were being processed. No time limit was fixed for maximum detention and the centres were much like prison facilities. In 2002 the government tightened up its immigration policy as a response to public concern about the rising numbers of asylum seekers and illegal immigrants arriving in Britain in the late 1990s. Today there are ten immigration removal centres in England and Wales, all run for profit by private companies at the taxpayer's expense. Those detained and their advocates have frequently complained about the conditions inside detention centres and the treatment of detainees by staff. In February 2002, violence broke out at the Yarl's Wood centre in Bedfordshire because the firm running the facility, Group 4, allegedly refused medical treatment to a detainee. The rioting resulted in a break-out and a fire that destroyed half of the £100 million centre. Disturbances, hunger strikes and suicides are common occurrences in all of Britain's immigration removal centres.

FURTHER READING

Mr Pip by Lloyd Jones

Small Island by Andrea Levy

Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe

The Grapes of Wrath by John Steinbeck

What is the What by Dave Eggers

A Long Way Gone by Ishmael Beah

Human Cargo by Caroline Moorhead

www.chriscleave.com

Home Office site on IRCs: <http://tinyurl.com/6ydlcy>



Continued from front:

Over the coming weeks, Sarah must contemplate her return to normal life but finds little comfort in the world she has made for herself. Her job, her ongoing affair with Lawrence and even her conscience provide little shelter from her darkest thoughts. Despite every conceivable difference in background and experience, Sarah and Little Bee come to realise that they have a connection literally forged in blood, and that they must save themselves, and each other, from the cruelties of life.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chris Cleave has been a barman, a long-distance sailor, a teacher of marine navigation, an internet pioneer and a journalist, although he currently works as a writer of novels and a regular family column for the *Guardian*. His debut, *Incendiary*, a controversial open letter to Osama bin Laden, gained notoriety for the macabre coincidence of its UK publication on 7th July 2005, the day of the London terrorist bombings. It went on to become an international bestseller published in 20 countries to awards and critical acclaim. His second novel, *The Other Hand*, was inspired by his early childhood in West Africa and by an accidental visit to a British concentration camp. Chris lives in London with his French wife and two mischievous Anglo-French children.

READING GROUP GUIDE

THE OTHER HAND

Chris Cleave



**'A very funny book about brave, funny people . . .
Just read it' Anna Carey, *The Gloss***

It is a warm morning in May 2007, and a Nigerian refugee calling herself Little Bee has just emerged, not entirely legitimately, from an immigration detention centre in Essex. She is afraid and ultimately alone, but she is also intrigued by Britain with its Queen's English and its baffling customs. After a bittersweet encounter with a farmer and his wife, Little Bee embarks on a long journey through the English countryside to the high suburbia of Kingston-upon-Thames, past the rows of shiny cars and straight to the front door of high-powered magazine editor Sarah O'Rourke and her Batman-obsessed son Charlie. Little Bee has nowhere else to turn and Sarah, on the day of her husband's funeral, has her reasons for letting the girl stay. Something has happened that has not only left its mark on Little Bee but has shaken the O'Rourke family to its foundations, and it has something to do with a beach in Africa and the missing finger on Sarah's left hand.

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